



MEET OUR AMBASSADORS

Assaf Distelfeld

Full Professor

Head of the Institute of Evolution

Department of Evolutionary and Environmental Biology,

Faculty of Natural Sciences



Field of Research:

Plant genetics; Wheat domestication, Genomic resources

SHORT BIO

I graduated from the University of Haifa in 2006 and continued to a postdoctoral training at UC Davis, California. My laboratory and its collaborators have changed wheat genomics by being the first to develop a unique approach that led to the sequencing of wild emmer wheat (Avni et al 2017, Science 357 93-97), and many other wheat genomes. In 2020, I was appointed as the Head of the Institute of Evolution at the University of Haifa. My laboratory specializes in developing genetic and genomic resources to study wheat domestication and reveal the regulatory mechanisms that enabled wheat to become one of humanity's most important crops. I think that a major key for a sustainable humanity is to transform our agriculture system from extensive to regenerative. This shift will protect our environment, however, more knowledge and development of genetic materials are needed to support regenerative agriculture. The mission of the Institute of Evolution is to promote regenerative agriculture and develop the expertise that will help implement this environmental revolution. In my spare time, with my family, I like to hike in the wilderness, and I am fully committed to the idea that our future generations should live in a healthy world while preserving and enjoying nature.

FUNDRAISING NEEDS

It is widely accepted that future agriculture will face the challenge of increasing productivity under limited resources. New genomic technologies offer a great potential to advance our understanding of plant productivity together with resistances to biotic and abiotic stresses. **Therefore, the Institute of Evolution is currently establishing a Genome Center (IoE^{GC}) for supporting activities related to regenerative agriculture. While I was able to obtain a grant for equipment, funds are needed to support IoE^{GC} personnel and operations. Funds are also needed for fellowships for students and postdocs choosing to study regenerative agriculture.** We have recently signed an agreement with the 'Model Farm for Sustainable Agriculture' in the nearby Neve Ya'ar research center which is expected to attract many students. This collaboration will position the University of Haifa as an expertise hub in sustainable and regenerative agriculture.